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C O N F I D E N T I A L ALMATY 000717

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (JMUDDGE); DRL/PHD (CKUCHTA-HELBLING)

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL KZ POLITICAL

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: SEVEN ARRESTED IN SARSENBAIULY MURDER CASE

REF: A. ALMATY 692

B. ALMATY 646

C. ALMATY 576

Classified By: CDA MARK ASQUINO, FOR REASONS 1.4(B) and (D)

1. (C) Summary: The Ministry of Interior (MVD) announced the arrest of six suspects in the Sarsenbaiuly murder case (reftels) on February 20. According to the MVD, five of the suspects -- all current KNB (National Security Committee) agents -- have confessed to kidnapping the victims on orders of the sixth (hereafter "A1"), who allegedly paid each of the five men \$5000. The MVD believes that A1 committed the actual murders, in concert with a yet-unidentified driver. The MVD has not revealed A1's identity, other than to describe him as a wealthy businessman and a former, corrupt policeman.

2. (C) Summary (continued): On February 22 the MVD informed LEGAT that, acting on information provided by A1, they had arrested an additional suspect in Astana, and had identified and located the presumed mastermind of the crime in an Astana hospital. On February 22, KNB Chair Nartai Dubaev reportedly submitted his resignation in reaction to the arrest of the five KNB agents. End Summary.

Tracing Telephones Leads to Breakthrough

3. (C) Ministry of Interior (MVD) officials arrested the first two of five alleged kidnappers -- all current members of a paramilitary unit of the Kazakhstani National Security Committee (KNB) -- on February 16. The MVD was able to identify the men by tracking calls made on the victims' cellphones. The two suspects then identified three other KNB colleagues involved in the crime.

4. (C) According to the MVD, the KNB agents confessed to having kidnapped Sarsenbaiuly, his driver, and bodyguard, in return for approximately \$25,000, or \$5,000 each. According to the suspects, on February 8 or 9 one of the agents had been recruited by A1, "an old friend," to kidnap Sarsenbaiuly as a "scare tactic." On February 11, they alleged, A1 had provided them with specific information on Sarsenbaiuly's whereabouts and ordered them to proceed with the kidnapping. The five men claim that they kidnapped the three victims and delivered them to A1 without knowing that A1 intended to murder them.

An Alleged Killer -- But No Motive

5. (C) The MVD arrested A1 on the afternoon of February 19. The MVD has not yet released A1's identity, but told LEGAT that he was a wealthy businessman and former policeman who had been fired from the force for corruption. As of February 20, the MVD was analyzing A1's cellphone activity in an attempt to identify a driver who they believe was also involved in the murder.

6. (C) On February 21, MVD officials told LEGAT that they were inclined to believe that the five KNB agents had not, in fact, participated in the actual killing. However, MVD investigators had not discovered A1's motive for committing the murders, as nothing in his personal or professional life appeared to tie him to Sarsenbaiuly. In part for that reason, the MVD began pursuing the hypothesis that A1, himself, had been directed to carry-out the murders.

Identifying an Alleged Mastermind

7. (C) On February 22, the MVD informed LEGAT that, based on information provided by A1, they had identified and located the suspected mastermind of the crime in an Astana hospital, and had arrested a seventh suspect, the alleged mastermind's "assistant." The MVD acknowledged to LEGAT that, other than A1's word, they had no evidence linking the alleged mastermind to the crime, but hoped that the money used to pay the kidnappers could be traced back to the mastermind.

KNB Chief Reportedly Submits Resignation

18. (U) According to press reports, KNB Chair Nartai Dubaev submitted his resignation to President Nazarbayev on February 21, in reaction to the fact that five KNB agents had been implicated in the crime.

ASQUINO